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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000663

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [KDEM](#) [PMIL](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES DEVELOPMENTS WITH COAS MOEEN

REF: A. DHAKA 657
[B](#). DHAKA 646
[C](#). DHAKA 560
[D](#). DHAKA 505
[E](#). DHAKA 484

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In an April 16 meeting with Ambassador Butenis and DATT (note taker), Chief of Army Staff Lt. Gen. Moeen Uddin Ahmed described the military's successes in support of the civilian government, cited the need for political party reform, provided assurances the military would remain subordinate to civilian government, defended his recent speeches, saying criticisms cited passages out of context, and promised to review allegations of human rights abuses by the military. The Ambassador reiterated core USG themes. She acknowledged the end 2008 elections timeline and noted the need for further details on interim steps, said the ban on political activity should be lifted now to allow important political party reform to move forward, stressed the necessity of civilian rule and the negative impact if the military overstepped its role, and emphasized the need to observe international standards of due process and human rights. Moeen's personal secretary, Lt. Col. Feroze, also attended the one hour meeting. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Political Reform and The Two Ladies: Internal political party reform is essential, Moeen said, but is difficult to achieve if Sheikh Hasina or Khaleda Zia remain in Bangladesh. Party leaders, however, were unwilling to tell Hasina and Zia to go. Moeen said senior Bangladesh Nationalist Party leaders met recently with government officials and decided that Zia must go. (Note: The government has indefinitely barred Hasina from returning to Bangladesh (Ref A) and Zia is expected to depart for Saudi Arabia shortly (Ref B)).

[1](#)3. (C) Governance: Moeen noted progress under the Caretaker Government, especially at Chittagong Port, which he claimed was fully functional now as a result of the military's involvement. He gave the civilian leadership mixed reviews, suggesting they had been slow to address problems and had made some questionable decisions, citing as an example the demolition of slums on public lands. The constitutional limit of 10 advisers plus the Chief Adviser was not enough to manage the government. One option under consideration is for the President and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court to increase this number. If that cannot be done constitutionally, another option is to appoint "special consultants" with the rank of state minister.

[1](#)4. (C) And the Army's Role: Ambassador, reflecting

concern in Washington and Embassy's previously expressed views, stressed that any political role for the army or Moeen himself would be a mistake for Bangladesh, and something we could not support. Moeen denied, as he has in the past, that the military had or would assume a political role. He ruled out martial law, denied plans for a military endorsed national unity government, said the army would not form a political party, and denied personal political ambitions "so far." He defended his recent remarks (Refs. C and D) but said he would speak publicly less in the future. The government will form a National Security Council, he said, but the civilian government, not the army, would determine its structure and composition. Military ranks will be increased to include the rank of full general (as first proposed under the Zia government, he said) to bring Bangladeshi military structure more in line with that of its South Asian neighbors. Moeen noted that even the military's limited role created opportunities for corruption; the army is under intense pressure to take bribes and Moeen has already removed several officers for abusing authority. He agreed to provide the details to the DATT.

15. (C) Human Rights: Asked about reports of military involvement in the torture of a minority leader (Ref E), Moeen noted on-going civilian and military investigations but downplayed reports of torture, suggesting the leader's injuries resulted from running into a tree while intoxicated. Challenged by the Ambassador to explain credible contrary accounts, Moeen promised to investigate.

16. (C) Comment: Moeen has consistently denied to the diplomatic community any possibility of martial law, a national unity government, or a military "king's party" but

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he was coy about a political role for himself. We have made it clear to him and others in the military that General Moeen in uniform must have no political role. He was no doubt burned by the negative reaction to his public political speeches, though he claimed that "70%" of the responses he received from the public were favorable. We will continue to reinforce our message on the need to focus on elections and a restoration of an elected civilian government as soon as possible. End Comment.
BUTENIS